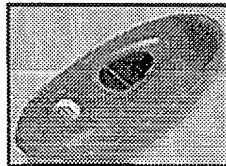## REVIEWS

Sony's eMarker: Remarkably Good

by *Michael Gabrillo*

[larger photo]

It is a "Well Connected" writer's dream... Hearing a great song on the radio and simply pressing the button on a fashionable Internet-connected key fob to iden it. No need to listen for title and artist at the end of the song, or attempting to s a few bars to the pink-haired weirdo at the record store hoping he'll recognize tune. Sony's eMarker is designed to do just that. Mark the name and artist of a song -as you listen to it- in less than one second.

Although the eMarker does not immediately identify the song, once you return home you dock the device to your computer and a desktop browser window is launched to display the list of songs you have marked. Using the browser, you can listen to a sample of the song to confirm eMarker's identification or purcha the music. But the eMarker works best with just one radio station and everythir isn't quite as it appears when first using the product.

The out-of-box experience is considerably less than we've come to expect fror Sony. The eMarker does not ship with desktop connection software, instead requiring that you connect to the eMarker.com web site and download it yourse The good news is that the rest of the installation is pain-free. Sony includes the coin battery necessary to power the unit for a reported 6 months of normal use and thankfully, the eMarker is a USB device.

In fact, both the docking station and the eMarker device itself uses USB, so yo can leave the docking station at home and simply plug the eMarker directly int your PC when at work or traveling with a laptop. This feature alone makes the eMarker a brilliantly designed product and returns Sony to our good graces.

And let's be honest... The device costs less than $20. At this price, anyone wh prides themselves as a gadget junkie or music aficionado can afford to splurge and try it out for a week. If you decide it isn't for you, just give it as a gift to any one of the many people that will say "Wow, what the hell is that?"
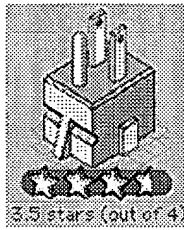
REVIEW SUMMARY

Pros:
Extremely low price for a product that has "SONY" printed on it, excellent use of USB technology and interesting

combination of music and Internet technology.

Cons:
Works with limited radio stations, works best with the radic station you select as your "primary station" and required a download of the software.

(Note: Before purchasing the eMarker, be sure to <u>check for coverage</u> in your area, and to make sure tha eMarker works with your favorite radio stations. To get the best possible service, make sure that your favorite stations are prefixed with double asterisks, which indicates that the eMarker site downloads mu: information from the station every 10 minutes).

Update: According to sources inside the company, Sony is hard at work on a Macintosh version of the eMarker desktop software.
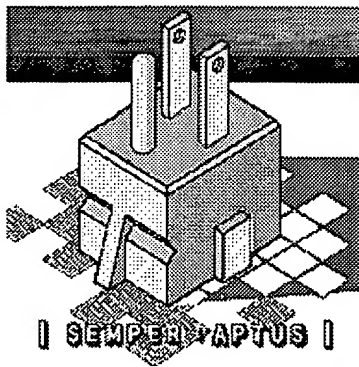
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<u>Ceiva Internet Frame (Internet Appliance)</u>
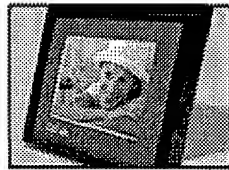<u>Other Articles by Michael Gabrillo...</u>

REVIEWS

The Perfect Gift for Grandma: A 'Net Connected Photo Frame
by Michael Gabrillo

[larger photo]

With everyone rushing to solve problems using the Internet, we've seen a num of odd appliances with senseless Internet connections. Refrigerators, stereos, even cars are hooking up to cyberspace. Since SemperAptus.com is founded the principal of "net connectivity", we wanted to find the "killer app" of web-connected hardware, and we did.
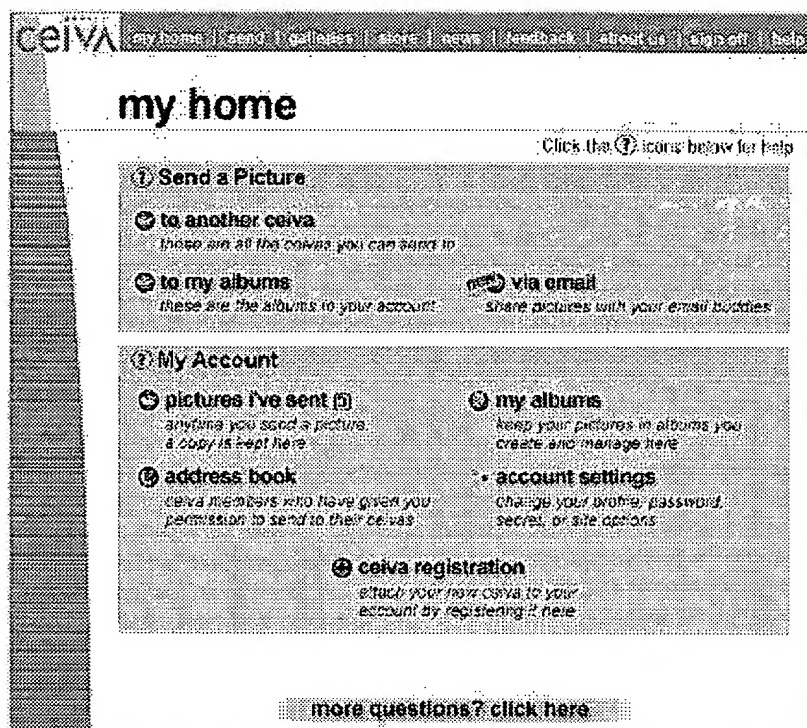
Ceiva Logic LLC, a Hollywood-based company backed by former Disney executives sells a single product: the Ceiva digital picture frame. The device is brilliantly simple; plug it into a power outlet and a phone jack and you're ready. The device automatically connects to the Internet using a local dial-up number and downloads pictures once a night. When you awake, the frame rotates thro all of the photos (up to 10 at a time) that have been sent to your frame. Matchi the two easy installation steps, the Ceiva frame has only two buttons to contro One button controls the contrast on the display and need only be used once. T second button scrolls through the photos in your frame and (when held down f seconds) will manually dial the Ceiva service and download pictures. The fram displays pictures on a nearly 5"x7", 640x480 pixel color screen, a standard use by many digital cameras and graphics programs. Photos sent to the frame in other resolutions are automatically displayed with a black background.

While the frame works extremely well, we did have a few issues with the set u process. While Ceiva Logic's web site clearly states:

> "You don't need a computer, an Internet account or a secret password to receive pictures on your Ceiva digital picture frame. It doesn't require a mouse, a keyboard or any prior computer experience"

users will need a computer and Internet access in order setup their Ceiva account, give permission for other users to send pictures to the frame, and to send pictures themselves. Once that is set up, the Ceiva frame can receive pictures without any other interference. Since the frame can only hold 10 pictu the oldest pictures will be removed as new ones are uploaded. Favorite picture can be "locked" so that they stay on the frame and not replaced by newer pictu using the Ceiva web site. The only time the frame owner will have to log in is it they want to give new people permission to upload to their frame. Savvy users will be able to easily manage the entire set up and maintenance process should they purchase the frame for an elderly or techno-phobic loved one. And Ceiva's credit, they have a wonderfully easy-to-use web site which almost coa us to let them slide by on this marketing slight-of-hand.
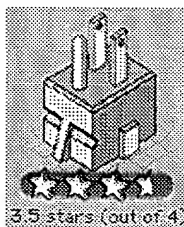
The well-designed Ceiva web site allows you to upload new photos, organize existing ones, and send photos to any Ceiva frame or E-mail address.

Aside from the nearly false claims of "no computer needed" we have only one other bone to pick with the company. Although they boast over 2,000 local dial numbers, we noticed certain rural areas were extremely thin. Oklahoma, for example has only 5 numbers for the entire state. Readers considering the purchase of the Ceiva, should check for local numbers using the company's lookup page as users without local coverage can use a toll free number, that costs an extra $5/month.

Speaking of which, cost for the digital frame is US$249, with a service charge picture downloads and web site access) of $2.99/month. Using the toll free service brings the monthly charge to $7.99. While we here at SemperAptus do make enough money to buy a Ceiva for every member of our family, the $249 price is far lower than Sony's digital picture frame that runs $899 and only receives pictures from their Memory Stick technology, not the Internet. For tho of you that really want to get on Grandma's good side, Amazon.com offers a special bundle: the frame and a one year subscription to the Ceiva service for $284.99.

REVIEW SUMMARY

Pros:
Brilliant concept, simple enough for anyone to use, excelle "automated" Internet connectivity.

Cons:
Limited local number area, requires computer set up.

All said, and even counting our hesitations, the Ceiva picture frame is our choi for the "killer app" of Internet appliance connectivity for the first half of the year 2000. Almost everyone but the truly inept should be able to use this "device" a who wouldn't love the ability to automatically receive a picture of your newborr grandchild without even lifting a finger?

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